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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1045
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0988

UNCLAS ANTANANARIVO 000179

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

ADDIS FOR AMBASSADOR COURVILLE
DEPT FOR AF/E, AF/FO, INR/AA, AND DRL
DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF/E RMEDRANO
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: ISLANDS TENSELY AWAIT MILITARY ACTION

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 157 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (U) The three islands in the Union of the Comoros tensely await impending military action. African Union (AU) Representative Mourad Taiati told international reporters in Moroni on March 4 that, "Today, everyone has taken our [AU] position. [Mohamed Bacar] is isolated and the military operation is an accomplished fact." He explained that a "final planning meeting" will be held on March 8 in Dar-es-Salaam to discuss the assembling of troops and logistical support from Tanzania, Senegal, Sudan and Libya "under the AU banner." He said French transport will be used for some 200 Tanzanian AU soldiers already in the Comoros since mid-2007, while additional AU troops ready to support the Comoran Union Army "should arrive within the next few days." [NOTE: Embassy sources report the French have only agreed to transport AU soldiers between the islands of Grande Comore and Moheli, not to Anjouan. END NOTE.]

¶2. (SBU) Media sources report, and sources on the ground confirm, a ship scheduled to supply fuel and food to Union Army soldiers poised for action at the staging base on Moheli was destroyed by a fire in the port of Moroni in the early morning of March 2. The circumstances surrounding the fire are unclear, but the rumor mill in Moroni suspects supporters of former President Azali and/or Mohamed Bacar set the boat on fire, possibly to hinder operations against Anjouan. It is highly unlikely the Comoran gendarmes will ever find the perpetrator, if indeed the fire was set on purpose, but at this point the greatest casualty seems to be the morale of Union Army soldiers in Moheli. Several sources report these young soldiers, who have never seen combat, have endured difficult living conditions for the past month with no clear end in sight. They remember that soldiers captured in the last failed landing in Anjouan in 1997 were raped in prison, and the videotaped footage was shown on Comoran television as a warning. Bacar's men have threatened the same treatment for Union Army soldiers who attempt a landing on Anjouan. News of the destroyed resupply ship only aggravated already sinking morale.

¶3. (U) The Comoran Foundation for Human Rights (FCDH) continues to circulate information about the victims of Mohamed Bacar's crackdown on opposition in Anjouan. The FCDH claims not a day goes by without the arrival in Moheli of wounded victims fleeing Anjouan and seeking medical treatment. FCDH's most recent report tells of a man incapable of speaking from the blows received during his six days in detention on Anjouan; another man arrived in Moheli with both arms and one leg fractured after his detention.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Given AU Representative Taiati's comment about forces assembled under the "AU banner," it seems the AU has resolved the question of whether AU military support will go ahead under an official AU mandate or unofficial AU approval. END COMMENT.
CASEBEER